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ABSTRACT

A project increased both interest and learning in a basic public speaking course, alleviating public speaking fears and promoting respect for the discipline. The specific purpose was to illustrate what makes a good speech through the analysis of a published speech chosen from designated collections in the library. Small group problem-solving techniques and group presentational skills were used, as students formed 6 groups of 4 members each to make 15-20 minute presentations to the class on the topic "What Makes a Good Speech?" Each group chose a short speech from designated collections in the library. The project reinforced and reviewed rhetorical theories previously taught by the instructor, helped to lessen speech anxiety, fostered social relationships within the class, taught students about the advantages and problems of working within a group, convinced students that oral presentations must be carefully planned and rehearsed, afforded an opportunity to handle audio-visual aids, and taught students an appreciation for oratory which recognized its literary quality as well as its rhetorical purpose. (A handout detailing the project and a group presentation evaluation sheet are included.) (SR)

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ENRICHING THE BASIC COURSE VIA ONE SIMPLE PROJECT

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Teaching the basic public speaking course can be challenging indeed! Each semester these classes are filled to capacity with, what might be called, reluctant learners: those who feel that they have been speaking for a long time so "who needs it," those who "have no desire to be public speakers," and those who are "scared to death" of the whole situation. So much has to be learned by so many who have so little interest!

As an instructor of such a course, I have devised a project which proved to increase both interest and learning. This method also helped to alleviate fears and to promote a genuine respect for our discipline. Those reluctant learners became champions of the course.

After instruction on the principles of public speaking and before the individual speech presentations, this project was introduced to the students. It involved using small group problem-solving techniques and group presentational skills. The students formed six groups of four members each. The assignment was to make a fifteen-to-twenty-minute presentation to the class on the topic "What Makes Good Speech?"

The first session on this project began in the library where the librarian arranged the collections in a segregated area. A hand-out regarding the basic requirements was distributed and explained. It read as follows:

SMALL GROUP PRESENTATION

Specific Purpose: To illustrate what makes a good speech through the analysis of a published speech.

Time Limit for Presentation: 15-20 minutes.

REQUIREMENTS

PREPARATION

1. Choose a short speech from one of the collections in the library: Vital Speeches, famous speeches of Lincoln, F.D. Roosevelt, J. F. Kennedy, Winston Churchill, Daniel Webster, etc. You may also find one from last year's nominating conventions interesting: Mario Cuomo, Jesse Jackson, etc.

2. Adjust the speech by choosing outstanding excerpts, to fit the time allotment for the presentation.

3. Make a copy for each member and one for the professor.

4. Have a transparency made of the speech. Be sure that the type is large enough to be read from the back of the room.

PRESENTATION

1. Introduce the speech by defining the rhetorical situation to the best of your ability: The Demands -- Audience, Occasion, Speaker, Purpose.

2. Project the speech (transparency) on the overhead projector so all can see.

3. Play a recording of the speech or have each member deliver a dramatic reading from a different part of the speech.

4. Proceed to address the problem: Why is this an example of a good speech? Apply all that you have learned so far about public speaking to this task. Above all be sure to establish the following: general speech purpose, specific speech purpose, organizational pattern, statement of thesis, location of the Introduction, Conclusion, and main points of the Body. Cite other elements: internal summaries, transitions, indicators of identification, methods of development and language style.

   This task, the body of your presentation, should be outlined and shared by the group members.

5. After 15 minutes bring your presentation to a conclusion. (This may include your personal feelings about the worth of this speech.)

EVALUATION

The group as a unit will be evaluated on the following criteria: Choice of Speech, Thoroughness of Preparation, Effectiveness of Presentation (includes ability to stay within the time limit), and Contribution to Cognition.

The evaluation sheet took the following form:

GROUP PRESENTATION EVALUATION

GROUP MEMBERS:

TITLE OF SPEECH:

SPEAKER:

OCCASION FOR SPEECH

TIME:

PLACE:

RHETORICAL SITUATION:

GENERAL PURPOSE:

SSP:

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION	5	4	3	2	1	COMMENTS
CHOICE OF SPEECH						
THOROUGHNESS OF PREPARATION						
EFFECTIVENESS OF PRESENTATION						
CONTRIBUTION TO COGNITION						

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

GRADE_____

The group presentations took three fifty-minute per class sessions. Here are some of the results of the project:

First, it served to reinforce the rhetorical theories taught by the instructor. Analyzing these acknowledged works of oratory functioned as a good intermediate exercise between learning how to and creating one"s own speech. These presentations also reviewed these principles for the audience. Second, it helped to lessen speech anxiety. Addressing an audience for the first time as a group member rather than alone gave one the sense of "safety in numbers." Third, it fostered social relationships within the class. These small groups became support groups which encouraged interest and participation. The students had an opportunity to share their personal concerns. They learned that they were not alone in their feelings of apprehension. Fourth, this project taught them about the plusses and the problems of working within a group. They learned how to organize discussion, how to delegate authority, how to defer to the other, and how to achieve a consensus in an allotted period of time. Fifth, the group presentations convinced the students that oral presentations must be carefully planned and rehearsed. They also learned that what might look good on paper does not necessarily work well in presentation. Sixth, requiring the use of the overhead projector and, for some cases, the tape recorder afforded them an opportunity to handle audio-visual aids. Recognizing the benefits of such forms of support, they also realized the need to rehearse such use. Finally, this project taught them an appreciation for oratory. Many had never read a speech, let alone studied one. Now they recognized its literary quality as well as its rhetorical purpose. This project moved them to admire the accomplishments of such great orators as Patrick Henry, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King.

It has been said that effective teaching involves creating learning situations for one's students. This simple project served to teach mine a great deal. With a more positive attitude toward the course, they readily accepted their individual speech assignments. The course was enjoyed by all till the very end.